

Called to Care
Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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I was recently reading an article about a woman whose retirement took an unexpected turn when her husband had multiple strokes and she became his caregiver. I was struck when, in the article, she said, “The word ‘care’ comes from the old English, *caru*, which means *sorrow, anxiety, grief, trouble*.” She went on saying, “So, you know, that’s quite a package” ([A new start after 60: I became my husband’s carer – and saw travel, nature and love anew | Stroke | The Guardian](#)).

We are taught that giving care is admirable. We applaud those who are good caregivers especially to small children and to the elderly. We teach our children to be caring human beings. We notice when people act and live in ways that show *no* care for others.

And we often neglect to acknowledge that caregiving can be heavy and difficult work. It is the work of holding in your heart and hands the struggles of another. It *is* often the work of experiencing sorrow, anxiety, even separation as meeting people in the places of their vulnerability or pain often leaves us on the outside of the rhythms of our culture.

And yet in Jesus we see one who is called to care.

And today’s scripture illustrates that. In fact, it illustrates it in more ways that we often acknowledge.

See, when we read Matthew 9, our attention is typically drawn to the healing miracles. In the case of the verses we read today, that means we tend to focus on the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years and the child who had been declared dead. We are captured in this part of the story for various reasons. For some of us it is an opportunity to marvel at Jesus’ power. For some of us it is an opportunity to wonder what to do with such miracles especially in light of things that science teaches us. For some of us it causes us to wonder what our role is in this work of Jesus.

But, what if these actions aren’t *just* about what is restored in people’s bodies, but more broadly about restoring people to community?

It’s not that the healings themselves *aren’t* important. Yes - it matters to that woman that the flow of blood ceases. Yes - it matters to that child and to her family that her life is not ended too soon. But additionally, when these healings occur, people are not only restored to health but also to community.

And we often miss that.

Because remember, in Jewish culture women were considered ritually unclean when they were bleeding. For most this was a specific period of time each month, but for this woman it had been twelve years. In Jewish culture, corpses were also considered unclean so anyone who touched them was ritually unclean for a period of time.

So, it is important to remember that in these actions Jesus was not just taking care of these bodies, but also restoring people to community even as he risked his own separation.

And that takes us back to the opening verses Mark read today. Because, often, even when we read these together, we don't stop to really think about their connection. We read them more as a series of separate events or a day-in-the-life of Jesus. But Matthew did not put these stories together accidentally.

Rather we began with the calling of Matthew. Matthew, who we easily accept, but who we are told is a tax collector, one who would have been looked down upon because of his collusion with the empire, one who would have been separated from his community because of his job.

And after hearing that Matthew was called to follow Jesus, do you remember what the next scene in this chapter was? It was a scene around a table. Tables. So important in Jesus' story...and so often the place where community is created and restored.

So, yes, we are told that Jesus calls Matthew. And then we get to watch as Jesus eats with tax collectors and others who have been identified as sinners, and as the keepers of the law criticize him.

He calls a tax collector.

He eats with an assortment of sinners.

He heals the bodies of those whose ailments cause them to be called unclean.

And each of these is an act of care...an act where Jesus enters the vulnerability and pain of others *and* risks his own...an act where through his care community is restored.

So, where are we in this story?

Because as followers of Jesus we are called to live in his ways and that means we, too, are called to care. But, again, remember that care isn't just about a passing inquiry of health or a warm meal on a sad occasion.

To care, is to enter into the sorrow, grief, anxiety, and trouble of another.

To care is to step outside of our comfortable places to join others in their pain.

To care is to even risk our own connection for the benefit of another.

To care is to be willing to prioritize the needs of another and stand firm in that promise.

And isn't that really what a number of our commitments and values are about? After all, there are several things that we claim as a congregation.

We have been designated within our denomination as an Open & Affirming congregation. This means that we have made a commitment to stand with our LGBTQ+ neighbors, offering understanding, affirmation, and full inclusion.

We wear the title of Dementia Friendly congregation. This means we have made a commitment to create a more welcoming, safe, and respectful space for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

We continue in many ways to work for more complete inclusion of all people, providing resources and making adjustments to make possible the full engagement of people from across ages, abilities, and experiences.

All of these are acts of care. And all of these are commitments that are not complete on a single day or with a single task, but that ask for our continued work and willingness.

All of these are about building up the community, about offering healing that moves people toward - not away from - the community.

All of these are about honoring the humanity of our neighbors and about being willing to create diverse and inclusive communities.

See, ultimately, that's what Jesus was doing. By means of invitations to join him in ministry and at the table...by letting others touch him and being willing to touch them...through healings and conversations and simply looking people in the eyes. Jesus lived a life of care...and our calling is the same.

In fact, as a denomination we have named that in our identity statement. It reads, "*We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.*"

Friends, living lives of care isn't always easy. And it is important. For as followers of Jesus, we are called to care. May it be so.